

The Capacity of Farmer Organizations to Provide Extension & Advisory Services – Case Study of Cotton Producer Organizations in Burkina Faso –

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1. Introduction: The role for Farmer Organizations in the Provision of Extension and Advisory Services

The involvement of farmer organizations (FOs) in the provision of extension and advisory services (EAS) has been identified as a solution to the limitations of the hierarchical public sector extension system and market-driven private sector extension systems (Mercoiret et al., 1997; Stockbridge, 2003). Previous studies have noted that producer organizations (POs) are major actors in EAS systems, and that this leads to better orientation of the services (Swanson, 2006). However, although producer organizations are active in numerous industrialized and developing countries, studies examining the role of these organizations in the provision of EAS remain scarce. The conditions under which FOs provide well-suited, accessible and sustainable EAS to smallholder farmers still need to be identified (Faure et al., 2011).

This case study explores and compares two experimental projects conducted with cotton inter-professional associations (UNPCB, UPPC and UDPC)¹ in Burkina Faso: one project in association with the major cotton firm (Sofitex) in the region and financed by Agence Française de Développement (AFD), and the other promoted by SNV World (a Dutch development organization) independent of the cotton sub-sector. Both projects focused on testing an advisory approach called management advice to family farms (MAFF, see Box 1), which has been designed with the support of researchers (Faure & Kleene, 2004).

MAFF pilot projects have been instructive in demonstrating that, in a context where FOs are weak, the first benefit of the approach is to strengthen the FOs' own capacities, before achieving meaningful and sustainable results at the farm level. Where there are weaknesses in the FOs, funding and operating partners can assist and thus significantly influence the design (content, objectives and governance) of EAS. But

FOs then encounter difficulties in appropriating, adapting and scaling-up this new approach by themselves.



Figure 1: Harvested cotton. © UNPCB

In the case presented in this study, the scheme to co-manage EAS between Sofitex (the cotton firm) and UNPCB (the National Union of Cotton Growers of Burkina) led the latter to disconnect from its own membership and turn away from its original goals. In the end, the absence of tangible gains for Sofitex and emergent contradictions within UNPCB drove these two entities to split up and each establish their own EAS services. While Sofitex managed easily to redesign a "best fit" approach adapted to its own needs, UNPCB struggled with how to design advisory services to serve the divergent objectives of its members. On the one hand, EAS have to facilitate farmers' development in the context of the commercialization of cotton and, on the other hand, they have to unlock a household system based on cotton production in order to increase farmers' incomes and broaden development opportunities. Within the SNV project, whereas MAFF services meshed well with FOs' skills and objectives, the internal financial resources available were insufficient to maintain and scale-up these services beyond the duration and initial set of farmers participating in the project.

¹ These are respectively the national, provincial and departmental cotton producers' unions (s). "Departmental" here refers to the smallest geographic and administrative territory, equivalent to a municipality.

Box 1: Management advice to family farms (MAFF)

MAFF projects have sought to promote the provision of comprehensive advice to farmers. Faure & Kleene (2004) highlighted the five main principles that distinguish MAFF from other extension and advisory services:

1. MAFF is a holistic approach that allows the producer and his or her family to analyze their situation, plan, take decisions, monitor their activities and evaluate results; it encompasses the technical, economic and social aspects of their activities.
2. MAFF is a process of strengthening farmers' capacity to master various aspects of their activities (i.e., agricultural production and other income-generating activities, organization of work, management of cash flow, etc.) in order to achieve various family objectives. It is a matter of placing rural families at the very center of the advisory function.
3. MAFF is based on participatory learning methods (including training, exchange of experiences, promotion and use of indigenous knowledge, etc.) and support for decision-making (using various tools, such as "techno-economic" monitoring of production, calculation of gross margins, cash management, etc.), which are based to a large extent on numeracy and literacy.
4. MAFF implementation fits into farmers' realities: farmers involved in these approaches participate in networks for the exchange of technical and local knowledge, and they are often members – or even office holders – of producer organizations.
5. MAFF projects aim at building mechanisms for supporting producers with strong participation of POs and possible involvement of new actors, such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or consultants. They seek to empower farmers and their organizations in their interactions with other actors.

These experiences raise questions about the paths that need to be taken to simultaneously improve FOs' capacities (so that they can fully undertake their roles) and expand their activities to include advisory services, while also designing innovative governance and funding schemes that allow for scaling-up and financial sustainability.

For nearly a decade, several FOs in Burkina Faso have tried out the MAFF approach with the support of foreign aid. These pilot projects have been implemented on the periphery of national systems and the private sector, thereby further increasing the difficulty of ensuring the long-term sustainability of EAS without embedding them within national dynamics and structures. Nevertheless, these pilots have been seen as pioneering experiments in a context where policymakers and international donors have recently sought to renew and modernize EAS at the national level (see Box 2).

Box 2: Institutional context of provision of advisory services in Burkina Faso

The institutional and legal context shapes the process by which FOs evolve. More importantly, this context determines how demand-driven advisory services can be fulfilled.

Legal status of FOs and implications for delivery of advisory services

In Burkina Faso, two laws govern rural organizations: Law 14 for cooperatives (1999) and Law 10 for associations (1992). FOs are strongly encouraged to incorporate themselves in compliance with Law 14, following the economic role accorded to them by the state. However, numerous grassroots groups retain the status of associations, or even informal associations (i.e., they may be awaiting an opportunity to become formal or may lack the ability or willingness to register for formal status).

According to Law 14, cooperative and pre-cooperative groups with economic goals must operate within a specific sub-sector (e.g., cotton). In a context where farms rely on multiple activities, FOs tend to provide services for the different agricultural products, and not limit themselves in targeting EAS for a specific crop. Law 14, therefore, is aligned with the interests of only a few groups.

Law 14 makes it difficult to implement EAS under an approach such as MAFF where service provision is disconnected from a value chain focus. Because of possible contradictions with Law 14, elected FO representatives have avoided direct EAS provisioning that deal with diversification or more comprehensive issues at the farm level. They tend to let external projects implement such experimental efforts. In these cases, FOs act as executive partners, or as local NGOs working under contract.

The emergence of a national system for agricultural advisory services

After several years of reflection based on a diagnosis of the existing advisory system, the Government of Burkina Faso adopted a National System for Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services (known by its French abbreviation, SNVACA) in 2010. The main goal of the SNVACA is to better respond to farmers' needs by rationalizing the methods used and the support provided by all actors involved (including private and public advisors, FOs and NGOs). New funding opportunities were establishment through national development funds and contracting mechanisms, financed by the state and/or funding agencies within specific sub-sectors. Services can then be implemented by public or private providers or by FOs, but specific conditions must be met. In particular, as far as FOs are concerned, SNVACA mentions the necessity of "transparency, good governance, professionalism and enhanced technical, organizational and financial capacities". If conformity with Law 14 and the Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa

(the OHADA law) are enforced, this would lead to a drastic reduction in the number of FOs that are able to provide EAS. In the SNVACA report, FOs appear as EAS beneficiaries rather than as EAS providers. They are listed as part of the targeted public, along with smallholders, specialized producers and those involved in agribusiness. The operational system proposed is based on public extension agents using multiple methods e.g., farmer field school, MAFF, participative development of new technologies, model farms. The activities of FOs would be restricted to project execution, and only in relation to a specific sub-sector.

So far, 900 extension agents have been recruited by the government to support implementation of the SNVACA. FOs using the MAFF approach fear that their experience will not be taken into account and describe vague implementation modalities. They would like to have a more prominent role in the implementation of SNVACA, but they do not have sufficient proof of their capability to deliver sustainable EAS. A lot of work remains to be done to clarify the status and roles of extension agents within specific sub-sectors.

2. Case History

The story of EAS provided by cotton producer organizations (CPOs) in Burkina Faso takes place within the larger historical context of MAFF pilot efforts, FO empowerment in West Africa, and the reform of the Burkinabe cotton sector.

To get to the bottom of this story, we reviewed existing evidence linking the ability of CPOs to provide advisory services to five factors that are considered key drivers (Faure et al., 2011): funding mechanisms; external partnerships and institutional arrangements; power relationships between stakeholders; motivations and objectives of each partners; and available skills and methods used. The comparison between two projects using the MAFF approach with CPOs allowed us to distinguish difficulties that arose from the approach itself from those difficulties related to the institutional context or the CPOs' capacities.

2.1 The predominant role of research in the design and pilot testing of MAFF

The MAFF approach evolved out of several research projects undertaken in West Africa (Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger and Senegal) beginning in the 1970s. It was born out of a desire to take into account existing farming practices and rural realities, with a focus on the management process at the farm level. At the time, EAS that focused on technical production information was considered to be the best solution for rural development, since farmers' lack of technical knowledge was identified as the primary problem. The MAFF approach put forward the view that it was the lack of managerial knowledge that was more significant (Moumouni et al., 2011).

MAFF pilot projects were conducted with French support for nearly two decades in many francophone African countries. Support from various cooperative efforts (with the French, Dutch, Swiss and Belgian governments) has also helped to test and adapt the MAFF approach to different contexts. Although farmers are unanimously enthusiastic about the positive impacts of MAFF projects, financial sustainability and scaling-up implementation remain challenges.

2.2 The empowerment of farmer organizations

After the withdrawal of the state from agricultural EAS in the 1990s, economic services (i.e., marketing, supply of inputs) were entrusted to private firms, civil society, NGOs and FOs. While FOs were previously subordinate to state interests, since the 1990s they have become more self-reliant and autonomous in driving their own development.

Private firms provided agricultural EAS only in geographic areas where production was clearly profitable, such as in cotton-growing zones, in order to minimize investment risks. Outside of these areas FOs became privileged interlocutors, engaging directly with donors and NGOs, to implement new EAS efforts in neglected regions. It was in this context that the MAFF approach was introduced in Burkina Faso.

Box 3: The creation of UNPCB and Sofitex

Under the French colonial regime, cotton cultivation underwent massive expansion due to compulsory sowing. In 1947, the cotton sector was reorganized based on farmers' voluntary participation. The omnipotent region-wide *Compagnie Française pour le Développement des Fibres Textiles* (CFDT) took charge of the purchase and distribution of inputs and the sale of cotton output from francophone African countries on the international market, as well as the promotion of strong agronomic research and extension. When the countries became independent from France, very little changed. In Burkina Faso, CFDT was replaced in 1979 by a new parastatal named Sofitex (*Société Burkinabé des Fibres Textiles*), but it was partially owned by CFDT and the basic state-led model remained unchanged.

Through this period, farmers were progressively organized under a cooperative model through multi-purpose village groups, called *groupements villageois* (GVs), which enabled farmers to self-manage their cotton marketing to Sofitex and to access input credit through village-level joint-liability schemes.

Falling international prices at the beginning of the 1990s and large debts accumulated by GVAs led to drops in production and to the reform of the cotton sector. Both the government and the donors involved in the sector – essentially AFD and the World Bank – agreed that, given the importance of the sector, there was an urgent need to push for reforms.

The growing empowerment of independent farmer organizations, led the government to seek to minimize the

political risks of reform by establishing a more (government-) friendly union, and thus promoted the formation of a new National Union of Cotton Producers of Burkina (UNPCB).

Establishment of cotton cooperatives and UNPCB received support for the AFD financed capacity-building programs. It took five years to persuade Sofitex and producer representatives that reforms were in their best interests, and to reach a consensus among national stakeholders on the content of the reform. The first stage of reform focused on strengthening the capacities of farmer organizations. In 1996, the GVs, of which membership was obligatory for farmers, were replaced by market-oriented groups comprised solely of cotton farmers (i.e., cotton producers groups, known as GPCs) with voluntary membership. Since these groups were self-selected, they relied more on members' social capital and ability to monitor each other than formal management structures.

With the reorganization of farmer groups underway, reform efforts focused on introducing competitive pressures in the sector. Regional monopolies were granted to private firms engaged in the cotton market, input supply and transportation. The cotton production area was divided into three parts assigned to three different companies: Sofitex, Socoma and Fasocoton (see Figure 3). In 2006, an inter-professional committee was created to work with those three companies, UNPCB and other key market players. This committee deals with EAS, training of producers, credit funding, input supply, cotton seeds and fiber marketing, and research funding.

Mechanisms for refunds to UNPCB

Cotton firms refund UNPCB on the basis of 750 CFA francs per tonne of commercialized cotton, broken down as follows: 250 CFA francs/tonne per departmental union, 250 CFA francs/tonne per provincial union, and 250 CFA francs/tonne for the national union (representing approximately €350,000 for 300,000 tonnes annually). In addition to this allowance, commissions on cotton sales are paid directly to GPCs (3500 CFA francs/tonne).

The European Union (EU) and AFD also provided substantial resources to implement the reforms and donated warehouses, offices, vehicles, computers, and other items to CPOs. In this way, UNPCB was able to use its own funds to recruit technicians and pay allowances to its elected representatives.

Source: Adapted from Kaminski et al., 2011.

2.3 The role of CPOs in the MAFF pilots

Among the wide range of FOs that pilot-tested the MAFF approach, the experiences of CPOs make for a particularly valuable case study. The MAFF pilots were implemented during the same period when the CPOs were being created

and the cotton sector was undergoing reforms. CPOs were born out of the liberalization of private cotton companies, and thus have remained subordinate to these companies (see Box 3 on the creation of UNPCB and Sofitex).

With CPOs and cotton firms sharing the responsibilities of implementing MAFF, field operations were hampered by problematic power relationships and divergent points of view. Specifically, the design of advisory services played a pivotal role in determining the nature of the relationships among family farms, private cotton firms and CPOs. This story is related here, divided into four chronological stages corresponding to the cycles of available funding and stakeholder motivations.



Figure 2: Farmer focus group meeting. © UNPCB

Stage 1. 1993–1996: First methodological tests with research support

Agricultural research in southern Burkina Faso was primarily linked to the introduction and development of cotton production. It led logically to experimentation with EAS methods in order to adapt them to local contexts.

Under the framework of the integrated rural development project for Houet Kossi Mouhoun Province: Phase 1 (Projet de développement rural intégré/Houet Kossi Mouhoun), financed by AFD from 1993 to 1995, the national research institute (Institut de l'Environnement et de Recherches Agricoles de Burkina Faso, INERA) and the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (Centre de coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement, CIRAD), with help from the Regional Centre for Agro-pastoral Promotion (CRPA), designed an implementation guidebook for the MAFF approach. This guidebook included detailed tools: a farm notebook with which to collect and document the main technical and economic data on farm production and activities; technical summary sheets; a guide for facilitators; and a guide on assessment and monitoring. These tools established the basis for all subsequent MAFF advisory pilots (see Table 1).

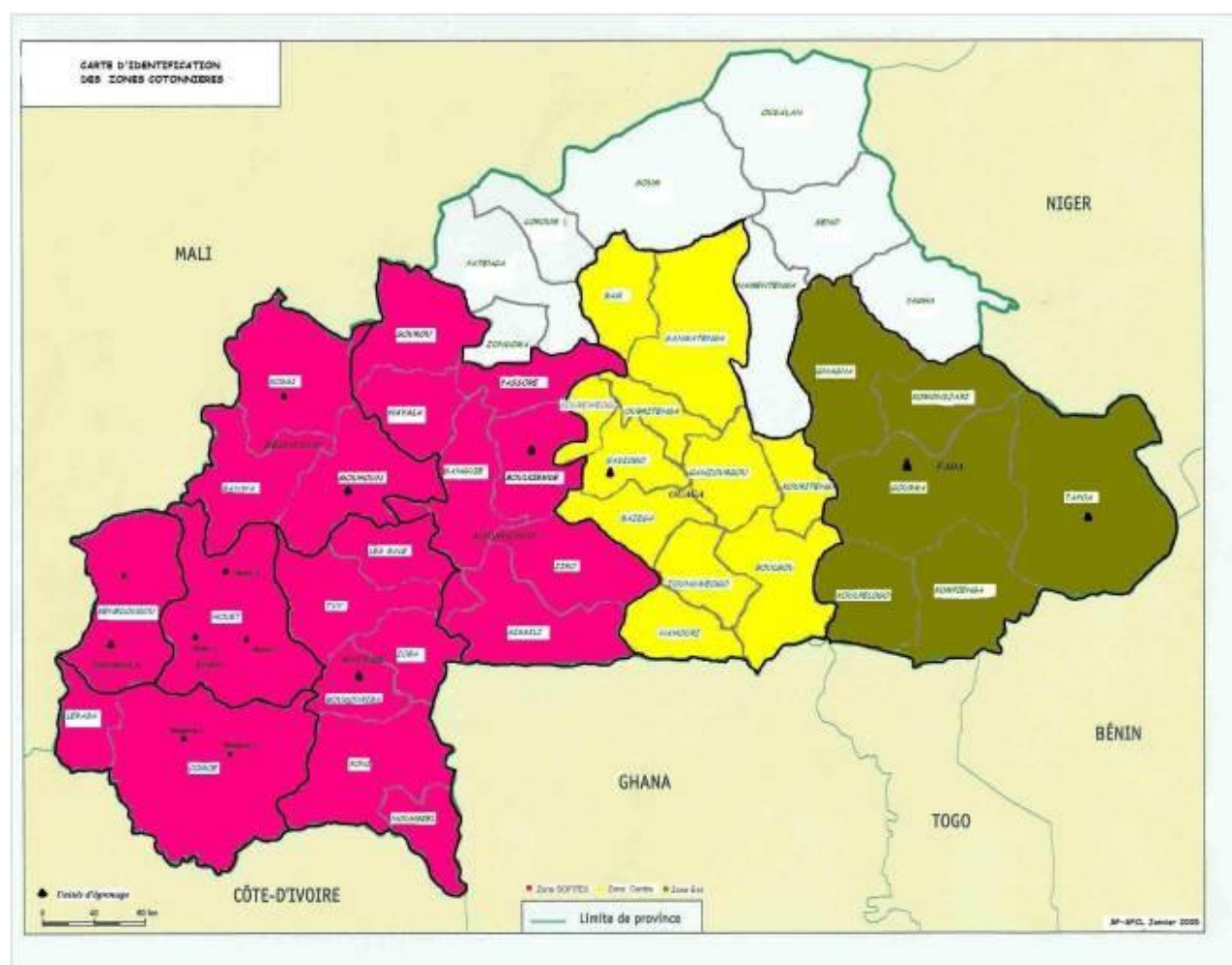


Figure 3: Cotton production areas in Burkina Faso and zoning of the three cotton companies (Sofitex, Fasocoton and Socoma)
Source: SP/SFCL January, 2005.

Table 1. MAFF field activities over a crop year (front-office)

Management cycle	Before the crop year			During the crop year				After the crop year	
Prepare and decide	Food security evaluation	Inputs and crop rotation planning	Cash flow forecasts						
Proceed				Cover crops	Fertilization	Phyto-sanitary protection			
Measure and evaluate				Monitoring of crops	Monitoring of expenses			Yield and gross margins calculation	Identification of constraints
Train			Monitoring of crops	Measurements of areas					

In 1996, data were collected in about 30 villages, after which the pilots ended. AFD continued with the Project for Providing Support to Organizations of Agricultural Producers (Projet d'appui aux organisations de producteurs agricoles; PA-OPA), which supported FOs, but without EAS. At this time, the training and visit (T&V) method was the preferred extension approach in use. The efficiency of the MAFF method was being debated within the AFD.

Stage 2. 1996–2000: Focus on cotton sector liberalization and UNPCB creation

UNPCB was progressively established during the period from 1996 to 2001 with AFD support of the PA-OPA and simultaneous reforms of within the cotton sub-sector.

Starting in 1996, voluntary-membership groups of local cotton producers (sub-village level) were introduced through the PA-OPA. These GPCs replaced the existing village groups created by market-oriented organizations, in order to wipe out producers' existing debt, and were established with new governance rules to help avoid acquiring new debt. GPCs became the interface between Sofitex and the farmers for the purposes of exchanging technical advice, input supply, credit management and marketing of cottonseed.

The newly established GPCs quickly felt the need to come together at higher levels of aggregation for two reasons. First, to improve the coordination of their services (i.e., information dissemination, training, and financial and organizational management support) and, second, to mediate their relationship with Sofitex.

In 1997, the Departmental Union of Cotton Producers (Union Départementale des Producteurs de Coton, UDPC) was created, bringing together GPCs at the departmental level, and the Provincial Union of Cotton Producers (Union Provinciale des Producteurs de Coton, UPPC) grouping together the UDPCs at the provincial level (see Figure). In 1998, the provincial unions decided to create the National Union of Cotton Producers of Burkina Faso (Union Nationale des Producteurs de Coton du Burkina, UNPCB), in order to represent farmers within the commodity chain at the national level. The UNPCB became a partner of the cotton firm, Sofitex, in 1999, within the framework of a cotton sector inter-professional agreement. This agreement specified mechanisms for the joint management of the cotton sector. The government's recognition of the farmers' capacity to invest in private companies resulted in the transfer of state shares to FOs. In subsequent years, new players were introduced: private input providers, new sub-national private cotton monopolies (Socoma and Fasocoton), and private transport companies.

The UNPCB rapidly began to fulfill its role by offering economic services to its members and representing farmers' interests. It subsequently expressed interest in developing EAS. However, after a feasibility study, AFD refused to

allocate funds for the UNPCB to provide of advisory services to its members, citing the Union's lack of capacity.

Instead, AFD set up the PA-OPA to strengthen the professional capacities of the GPCs, and introduced grassroots management advisors.² Following PA-OPA requirements, management advisors for credit were trained in order to assist GPCs in financial management. Forty-eight credit advisors were recruited by the UDPCs in order to support the 804 GPCs. The advisor's wages were initially paid half by the project and half by GPCs and the UDPC, but the UDPC subsequently took over this responsibility completely. Supervisory positions were also created at the provincial level and supervisors were progressively paid by the UPPCs).

Stage 3. 2000–2005: Attempts to relaunch the MAFF pilot process

2000–2002:

Sofitex initiative

In 2000, Sofitex advisory services were thrown into crisis: farmers faced problems with soil fertility decline that the advisors could not solve. The advisors felt incompetent and thus demotivated. With support from researchers, Sofitex relaunched a process of piloting the MAFF approach through a three-year project funded by the EU through its Stabex programs.³

Through this project advisory tools were improved, placing emphasis on advice relating to cotton production standards. Ten cotton advisors were trained in the MAFF method and tools, and ten villages were targeted. Voluntary groups were established within GPCs. The true testing of the MAFF approach could not be completed, however, because Sofitex's lack of will hindered the implementation of an evaluation and monitoring system. Also, no formal role was assigned to UNPCB, in spite of its involvement in the process from the beginning.

2003–2005:

New AFD support for training and capacity-building

In 2003, positive results reported at the departmental level convinced UNPCB and Sofitex to propose operational guidelines to implement and scale-up use of the MAFF approach. The planned activities included training new advisors, capacity-building of supervisors, and FO capacity-

² The PA-OPA project ran from 1997 to 2000, and was followed by PA-OPC, from 2001 to 2004 (Project for providing support for the professionalization of cotton producers organizations; in French, *Projet d'appui à la professionnalisation des organisations de producteurs de coton*), and then by PRFCB from 2006 to 2009 (Project for strengthening the cotton sector in Burkina Faso; in French, *Projet de renforcement de la filière cotonnière burkinabè*); the latter project continued until 2012.

³ Stabex (*Système de stabilisation des recettes d'exportation*) is the acronym for a [European Commission](#) compensatory finance scheme to stabilize export earnings of [ACP countries](#).

building, such that advisory services could be better implemented and monitored. Through the PA-OPC project, AFD agreed to finance research and training support for three years. About 30 MAFF advisors and 30 managers and supervisors were trained. Farm typologies were produced for all cotton areas, for use in familiarizing advisors with rural

realities and the functioning of different farm types. Approximately 100 farmer groups were constituted, representing 1500 producers. Extension workers were enrolled to work with the groups, and group steering committees were created at each level, to facilitate monitoring.

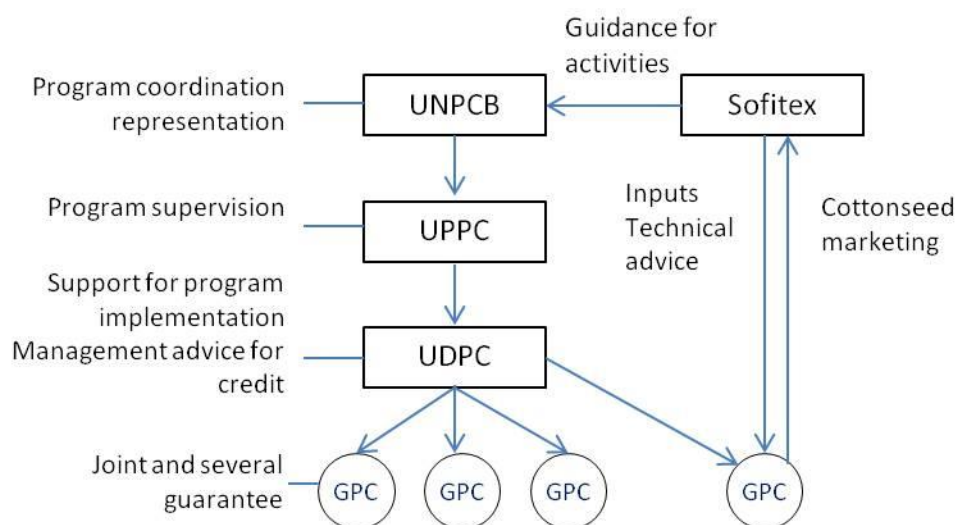


Figure 4: Relationships between cotton producers' organizations and the cotton company

Despite the investments in these organizational components, MAFF implementation failed. The UNPCB could not make the steering committees function. The lack of goals, skills and knowledge-sharing between the MAFF CPOs and Sofitex were identified as key problems. In addition, the EAS coordinator was based at the national union headquarters, and was not well informed about the mistakes in MAFF implementation on the ground.

Within Sofitex, the status of MAFF advisors led to many problems. MAFF advisors were paid the same as cotton advisors, who were less qualified and had fewer responsibilities and activities. At the same time that the MAFF advisor were added, institutional reforms within Sofitex led to a decrease in the number of employees, especially field workers. Moreover, the managers of the two new private cotton firms (Fasocoton and Socoma) operating in the eastern portion of the country (see Figure 3) started recruiting some of the newly trained Sofitex MAFF advisors to build up the capacities of the new cotton firms.

Stage 4. 2007–2012: A whole project focused on EAS implementation

On the basis of the practical experience gained by Sofitex and the MAFF CPOs, AFD finally agreed to finance full implementation of the MAFF approach within the framework

of the Project for strengthening the cotton sector in Burkina Faso (Projet de renforcement de la filière cotonnière burkinabè, PRFCB). Costs were divided into three parts, with portions allocated to the state, UNPCB and the cotton firms. The project was expected to implement EAS (organizational and technical aspects), and establish a truly endogenous funding scheme. Unfortunately, new problems arose that again hindered MAFF implementation. This time, the cotton price crisis and the empowerment of CPOs were the main causes. In 2012, the project came to a standstill.

2007–2009:

Sofitex immobility and UNPCB claims

No activities took place during the first two years. The stakeholders themselves struggled to explain the reasons for this. No doubt one reason was that the MAFF implementation became a strategic tool whose control Sofitex was not willing to cede to UNPCB. MAFF became a sensitive topic for the cotton firm, especially in the context of the cotton crisis. After a decade of remarkable growth in cotton production (1996–2006), falling international cottonseed prices and increasing input prices led to farmers and private firms becoming disenchanted with the sector. Numerous organizational failures emerged, the causes of which were poorly understood at the various levels of the organizations. Disagreements arose between UNPCB and

Sofitex, relating to the EAS goals, available human and financial resources, the enrolment of farmer extension workers, and the involvement of CPOs in implementation and monitoring. During this period, relations between UNPCB and Sofitex were also undermined by a maize commercialization initiative launched by UNPCB. This initiative was undertaken in response to farmers' needs for a viable cash crop, and led to land being taken out of cotton production and put into maize, resulting in the removal of UNPCB's president from office. Meanwhile, UPPCs and UDPCs were poorly informed of the negotiations taking place at the national level.

At the same time, new MAFF pilots were underway in the region, led by other donors (SNV and Agriculteurs Français et Développement International, AFDI). SNV, in its implementation of the MAFF approach, contracted with UDPCs and UPPCs that were trying to find solutions to their members' problems, in particular those relating to soil fertility. The SNV project focused on local CPO capacity-building and the training of farmers as extension workers. SNV used a popular form of teacher training – the cascade model – which enables many extension workers and participants to be reached in a short time.

Through these experiences, Sofitex became increasingly convinced about the pitfalls of engaging in the joint provisioning of advisory services with CPOs: the changes in the status of advisors did not produce the intended results. According to Sofitex, UNPCB seemed to be reaping the rewards of the company's work. Whereas the increasing number of MAFF pilots obscured and masked Sofitex activities. The advisory activities of these various projects are represented in Figure .

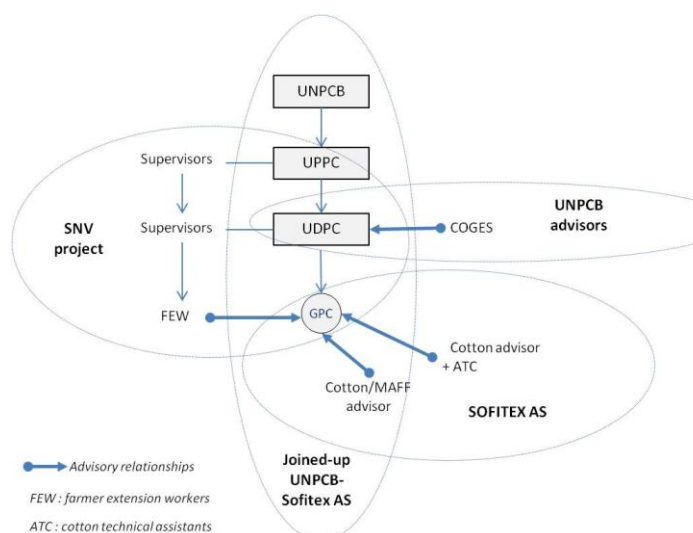


Figure 5: The hodgepodge of advisory services provided to cotton producers

2009–2012:

Under donor pressure, advisory services are finally implemented within a (flawed) framework

It was not until 2009 that a MAFF governance scheme was set up based on recommendations from external experts. MAFF activities started in villages in 2010. UNPCB was, for the first time, officially in charge of monitoring, managing and accounting.

Joint steering committees (involving CPO representatives and cotton firm agents) were set up at each level. As the UDPCs and UPPCs had not previously been involved in MAFF design and pilots, and their roles had not been clearly defined, they encountered difficulties with MAFF implementation. Consequently, Sofitex retained control over the monitoring of field operations. Around 15 MAFF advisors trained 168 groups, with a total of 3000 participating farmers. Farmer extension workers were not recruited; thus the system has not been scaled-up to reach more families.

2.4 Separation between CPOs and cotton firms for a reconfiguration of EAS

An external audit carried out at the end of 2012 noted numerous failures and recommended an overhaul of the EAS through a separation between CPOs and private firms. However, this separation was not implemented since donors viewed the partnership between these stakeholders as a key element in providing EAS.

For Sofitex, the lessons learned were clear. The partnership with UNPCB prevented them from improving governance and methods responding to their own needs. Transaction costs of implementing the MAFF approach were too high for the benefits accrued. Sofitex advisors could not manage to perform all their tasks properly: gathering data at the farm level, analyzing the functioning of farms, facilitating collective discussions and exchanges, disseminating standard knowledge on cotton production, etc. From their perspective, the steering committees were useless and CPOs didn't provide any input that was useful to MAFF implementation.

Sofitex developed a vision for the CPOs' future role in a renewed, jointly managed EAS system: providing farmer extension workers and providing EAS for specialist niches, such as organically grown cotton, conservation agriculture, or financial management of local groups. According to this vision, the advice provided should stay focused on core technical issues so that cotton production will not be jeopardized.

For its part, UNPCB remains somewhat confused. Although aware of its own weaknesses, the organization finds it difficult to bring about comprehensive and far-reaching changes. It has always served in a subordinate role, which prevented it from undertaking autonomous decision-making and development. MAFF implementation has highlighted contradictions that UNPCB was forced to face: the challenge

of how to defend producers' interests while simultaneously reinforcing growth of the cotton sector. The partnership with Sofitex led UNPCB to become disconnected from its own members, thus further preventing it from building its own strategic vision. The lessons that UNPCB can draw from the experience are yet not clear. UNPCB has established a national network that is attempting to draw lessons from the data, experiences and evaluation of MAFF implementation over the past ten years. At present, UNPCB is still considering the different scenarios for change that have been proposed by the external audit.

2.5 Perspectives from another model of EAS delivery tested with a local CPO

SNV first started experimenting with the MAFF approach in 2002, in addressing farmers' soil fertility problems. Until 2006, the approach used consisted of setting up EASs at the departmental level with UDPC. Subsequently, UPPC were included in the governance scheme in order to improve coordination and achieve sustainable self-financing.

The EAS model designed and tested by SNV is referred to as endogenous because it only uses farmer extension workers, within a cascade training system. In designing the advisory services provided through this model, SNV's approach ensured they were tailored to suit the available human and financial resources. This approach differs from that used in the AFD project in several ways:

- It is demand-driven, designed to be appropriate at the local level (departmental unions and GPCs).
- The advice offered is focused on subsistence issues, income improvement and problem solving through exchanges and discussions.
- It includes direct payment of the farmer extension workers and supervisors by the beneficiaries themselves (see Table 2 for a more complete comparison).

Despite a few lacunae (notably, delays in payment, lack of commitment, and lack of strong day-to-day support), this experience demonstrated that efficient EAS, based on an overall approach of whole-farm functioning, management tools and peer exchanges contributed to great improvement at the individual level and was affordable by CPOs.

3. Lessons Learned

The experiences CPOs participating in the delivery of extension and advisory services to their members highlight several lessons regarding (i) the pathways for designing EAS in a multi-stakeholders process, (ii) the "best fit" MAFF method, and (iii) the key attributes that CPOs must have in order to provide financially sustainable EAS.

3.1 Pathways for designing sustainable EAS in a multi-stakeholder, project-funded process

In both cases, the main lesson learned was that experimental EAS implementation should not be disconnected from a planned strategic vision for the co-evolution of FO capacity-building and EAS goals. In the absence of such a strategic vision, the timing of the project, the donors' own strategies and their understanding of key issues may override the endogenous design process. Facing the urgency to "do something" in the project framework, stakeholders (i.e., FOs and private firms) established uncomfortable compromises on most of the key issues (i.e., costs and supervision of EAS), which then later impedes the introduction of improvements in EAS provisioning. The system is essentially locked (see Figure 6), which leads to an advisory mechanism that cannot be appropriated by either the CPOs or the cotton firms and is thus unsustainable.

The AFD project had many ambitious goals: reinforcement of the cotton sector through the empowerment of CPOs; testing of MAFF methods; experimenting with co-managed EAS. Whereas UNPCB and Sofitex were learning to work together faced the cotton crisis, the EAS management scheme had to be developed under project pressure. These pressures led to the management of EAS being modeled on the management of other services (i.e., inputs and credit supply) provided by the UNPCB. Steering committees and procedural controls were set up at each level (GPC, UDPC, UPPC, UNPCB), yet this raised questions about the pertinence of such a governance structure for EAS and the suitability of GPCs also serving as groups of MAFF participants.

The absence of guidelines for each committee underlined the fact that their respective roles and responsibilities were not carefully considered. The SNV approach, in contrast, started first at the lower level (UDPCs), which led to a precise identification of the role of the upper level UPPCs. This experience also showed that increased control over funds was necessary to allow self-financing through the reinvestment of cotton taxes into EAS.

The adequacy of GPCs to act as MAFF participant groups can also be questioned. These groups were created in order to provide a joint guarantee on the amounts received as input credit. Many farmers who were excluded from these groups found themselves without access to EAS. These groups have a high degree of heterogeneity in terms of learning capacities and needs. Group composition and interaction between groups should be reconsidered in order to improve MAFF impacts.

The decision to co-manage EAS provisioning meant that steering committees consisted of agents of cotton firms, elected representatives from CPOs and technicians. It appeared that the management focus on the multi-stakeholder committees prevented thorough discussions and exchanges within the CPOs, which, if it had occurred, may

have enabled them to build their strategic vision based on field results. The CPOs were effectively missing opportunities for internal dialogue and organizational learning. Their time was mainly spent on the participating farmers targeted through MAFF implementation in GPCs. Steering committees were used to solve logistical problems as they arose, but were unable to recommend strategic changes that could have helped improve the EAS.

Moreover, the cotton crisis induced many farmers to switch to growing cereals such as maize or rice. The cotton firms

became apprehensive that MAFF would only strengthen this process by providing economic advice to farmers. This helps to explain the lack of genuine political will on the part of the cotton firms to support the scaling-up of the MAFF pilots. These pilots remained limited, embedded within the broader technical support services of the firms and MAFF implementation remained a secondary activity for cotton advisors. The dissemination of standard techno-economic information on cotton production remained the main purpose of the EAS.

Table 2. Comparison of MAFF design processes, characteristics of the operational mechanisms and sustainability

Experimental model	Endogenous problem-oriented EAS	Jointly implemented solution-oriented EAS
Donor	SNV	AFD
Beneficiaries	Departmental unions (UDPCs) and provincial unions (UPPCs)	National Union (UNPCB) and Sofitex
Donors' global objectives	Strengthen FO capacities and sustainability of farms	Strengthen cotton sector Open discussions between private firms and farmers Support sustainability of cotton producers
Intervention attitude	Accompanying	Directive
Primary farmer organization (FO) motivations	MAFF seen as a means to solve productivity problems at the farm level	Collaborate with cotton firms MAFF seen as a strategic means to defend producer interests in discussion with private firms
EAS implementation		
Duration	2 phases: 2002–2006; 2007–2011	4 phases between 1993 and 2012
Stakeholders	CPOs (UPPCs, UDPCs, GPCs), SNV, contract out with local capacity builder Demand-driven	Cotton firms, CPOs (UNPCB, UDPCs, UPPCs, GPCs), AFD, research Supply-driven
Management system	Management by UPPCs Implementation by UDPCs	Co-management between cotton firms and UNPCB. Steering committee at lower levels (UPPCs, UDPCs) for implementation
Operational system (front-office and back-office)		
Method used	Simplified MAFF methods with adaptations in order to take into account the nature of farmers' problems Oriented toward problem-solving	MAFF methods with adaptations for technical issues (cotton-oriented advice) Standard orientation toward dissemination of technical knowledge
Human resources and skills	Exclusively uses farmer extension workers recruited from GPCs and UDPCs	Professional advisor (with an engineering degree) recruited by Sofitex
Number of extension workers	385	21
Number of participating farmers	1934	5117 (2% of cotton producers)
Cost	€11/farmer participant	€134/farmer participant
Sustainability issues (stakeholder perspective):		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of scruples in terms of EAS governance, fund transparency and EAS coordination with other services (e.g., supply of seeds and information); Lack of continuity due to turnover of elected officials and advisors; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for financial contribution from UNPCB in order to remain a partner in jointly implemented EAS system; Need for specifying EAS goals in order to improve governance scheme and receive endorsement of the cotton firm.

Other obstacles to a full commitment by Sofitex to the MAFF approach were linked to the co-management scheme. Negotiations with UNPCB concerning the co-management of funds led to high transaction costs that were not commensurate with the tangible results. As a result, the cotton firms preferred their own command-and-control system to manage field operations and to orient the assignments of the extension workers.

If EAS systems are to be enhanced through external projects, greater attention needs to be paid to the building a shared vision of EAS goals and to the timing of capacity-building for stakeholders. EAS implementation is not just a matter of experimenting with an advisory method, it must also involve the adoption of new institutional arrangements and management approaches. As such, project evaluation criteria should also take into account the correlation between the capacity-building of the FO and the implementation of the EAS. Using this approach, evaluation data on the impact at the farm-level are essential to help FOs appreciate the value of the EAS system, improve their management and build a strategic vision. Within the SNV project, for example, impact studies carried out after the first phase of the project served as the basis for improving activities during the second phase. These studies proved to be very valuable in convincing both external donors and the elected representatives of the FOs to invest more time in MAFF development. Within the AFD project, on the other hand, the absence of tangible evidence of positive impacts on cotton production provided the basis of the cotton firm refusing to scale-up MAFF implementation.

In conclusion, interventions of external donors that serve to accompany, as opposed to direct, local partners appeared to be much more suitable. The priority therefore is to build on FOs' strengths and create meaningful results in order to initiate EAS ownership by FOs. In addition, the timing and activities of projects should follow the organizational and technical learning pathways of the FOs. This implies:

- giving time to take stock of the initial results, in order to build a shared vision of EAS goals and to reconsider the management system before scaling-up;
- creating opportunities for internal exchanges and for building a strategic vision;
- according more importance to impact evaluations, which are needed to (a) help build a strategic vision, (b) improve the management system, and (c) convince not only the FO itself of the benefits of providing EAS but also convince donors to invest funds and time;
- adapting project evaluation criteria in order to link the EAS governance scheme to improvement in farmers' welfare and the FO's performance.

It may be concluded from the foregoing that development assistance faces quite a task in rethinking how to lead such projects. Normally, generic advisory methods are selected and established at the beginning of a project to ease rapid implementation. Since, as we have seen from the AFD and SNV examples, EAS delivery is strongly context-driven, the selection of features of EAS programs should be carried out in the process of establishing a locally adapted EAS system.

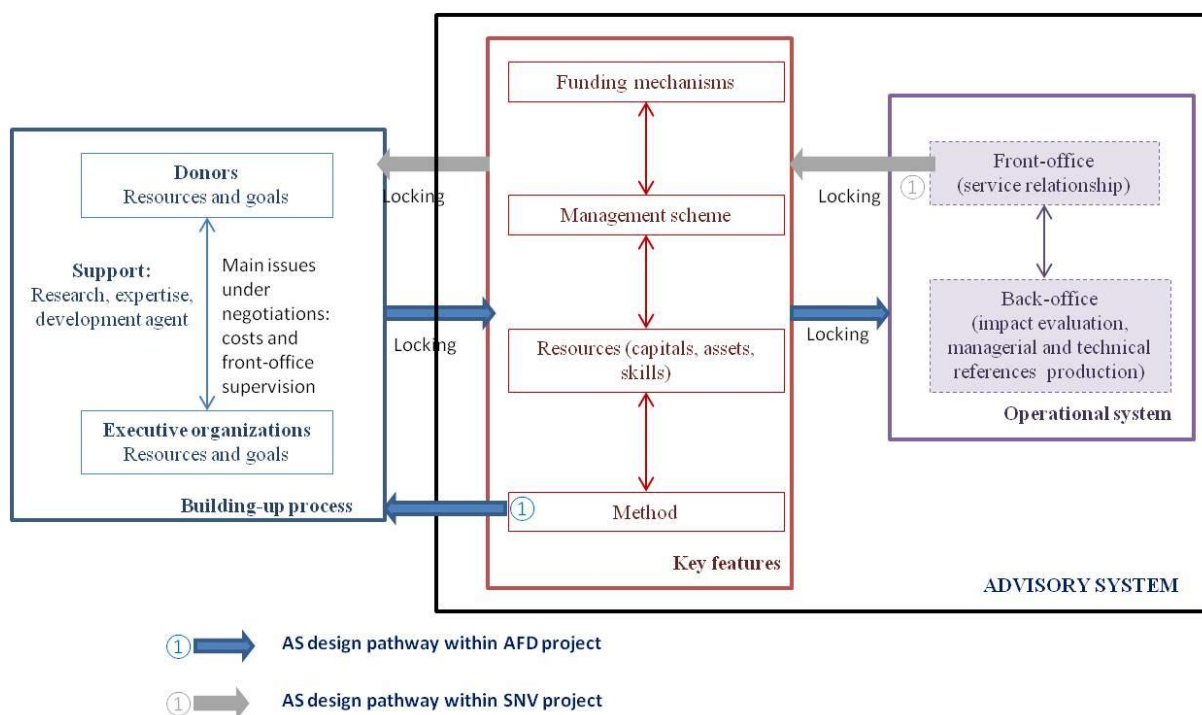


Figure 6: EAS system seen as a temporary institutionalized and locked compromise

3.2 Strategies to overcome CPO weaknesses in extension and advisory service implementation

The second lesson is that CPOs' weaknesses can be overcome using an endogenous EAS development process. Endogenous EAS entails using the complementarities of endogenous skills, calling upon local external expertise and using advisory methods as tools for strengthening capacities throughout the entire organization.

Extension workers and managers cited numerous FO weaknesses that impeded effective EAS implementation, including:

- the lack of transparency in the management of funds received from the sales of cotton, which prevented planning for self-financed EAS;
- insufficient involvement of elected representatives, which led to the lack of strategic decisions to adapt EAS to members' needs and FOs' capacities (this lack of involvement is due to the high rate of turnover of elected representatives, and the fact that their knowledge and management capacities are inadequate to deal with EAS challenges);
- the lack of honesty and inadequate skills of advisors, which led to demotivation of participating farmers;
- the lack of capacity to mobilize new partnerships in responding to FO needs, i.e., to integrate exchange networks or use local expertise to build sustainable solutions to their organizational or technical problems; and
- the large turnover of FO employees and elected representatives, which slowed down the process of EAS appropriation.

The following attributes relating to the internal organization of FOs and their external relationships emerged as important ways of overcoming these weaknesses:

- giving more attention to the link between elected representatives and the advisors;
- ensuring that those with complementary skills work more closely together;
- calling upon additional local expertise whenever necessary;
- stimulating flexibility and innovation in EAS implementation;
- using EAS as a core tool to the design all FO services and activities; and
- targeting focused initiatives in order to "scale-out" the local model (i.e., apply the same local adapted model in other locations, carried out by other FOs, instead of increasing the number of FOs applying unique EAS systems), and thus avoid the pitfalls normally associated with scaling-up diverse elements of local experience.

Internal relationships should be better taken into consideration

In order to face the high costs of advisor training and wages, and also to increase internal EAS management capacities, complementarities between skills must be sought at two levels: between technicians and elected representatives, and between professional advisors and farmer extension workers, through the strengthening of internal relationships.

One of the most valuable benefits from the MAFF pilots lay in the training of elected representatives. All of them attended MAFF courses and increased their management capacities considerably. In consequence, they now feel more capable of proposing an EAS strategic vision. They also forged closer relationships with their technicians, who are generally better educated. Technicians mentioned that elected representative learned how to plan activities and that discussions during steering committee meetings subsequently became much more interesting. These changes helped to improve the overall decision-making processes within the organization.

Technicians also learnt a lot from MAFF implementation. They increased their understanding of farmers' difficulties; something not taught at school. After two or three years of working as advisors, they became capable of delivering advice useful to farmers and were able to improve extension field methods by themselves.

In general, advisors learn quickly and FOs benefit from their increased knowledge of rural realities. In the AFD project, since all the advisors belonged to an external private firm, advisor capacity-building did not reinforce FO capacities. In fact, UNPCB lost touch with its own membership, becoming unable to respond to their needs. Therefore, advisors must be part of FOs in order to construct FO capacities and EAS system.

In short, management training of elected representatives and their in-depth interactions between technicians emerged as key aspects in strengthening FO capacities to deliver EAS.

Complementarities with local skills should be sought

Exploiting complementarities with the skills of extension workers Complementarities of skills between professional advisors and farmer extension workers should also be exploited. In the SNV project, the absence of professional advisors made it difficult to find innovative solutions to problems faced by farmers. In the AFD project, in the absence of farmer extension workers, professional advisors found it difficult to understand local social issues in the different villages, speak the local languages or to maintain participatory dynamics within farmer groups. In contrast, in the SNV project the continuous presence of farmer extension workers in the village played a major role in maintaining participation and thus had more of an impact on processes of change at the farm level.

Exploiting local external expertise. The ad hoc training of all the extension workers involved in each project was very expensive and is, moreover, not replicable. Two low-cost solutions have been found to counter problems arising in the course of EAS implementation: exchanges of experience among FO networks and the use of local expertise (i.e., retired senior advisors, associations specialized in learning methods) or local training courses at engineering schools or universities.

Use flexible approaches

As MAFF is not a standardized approach to solving problems, some advisors felt free to develop supplemental learning tools and thematic issues. In this way, MAFF became a better fit with members' needs, advisors' skills and financial resources. Particularly with regards to funding, flexibility in MAFF implementation offers the potential of greater sustainability.

Place EAS at the core of service delivery at the FO level

Many extension workers and elected representatives recognized that the MAFF approach was a powerful tool to diagnose farmer needs and identify room for maneuver in improving other services provided by the FO. Within such an orientation, the delivery of EAS need not be disconnected from other services.

Scale-out locally-rooted models of EAS

The limited ability of FOs to manage large numbers of workers and large amounts of funding means that small-scale operational systems, at very local levels, are preferable. Use of scale-appropriate systems enables FOs to stay close to farmer concerns and to build a locally-rooted governance scheme. Scaling-up therefore should not be understood as an increase in the number of advisors within the same governance scheme, which would overwhelm FOs, but rather as the scaling-out of well-suited and appropriately sized local models to other locations and organizations.

3.3 The “best fit” of MAFF methods

Comparing the two different project contexts (AFD and SNV pilots) improves our understanding of the “best fit” of MAFF EAS delivery. In one pilot (SNV) EAS was delivered by FOs, and in the other (AFD) by a private company (see Figure).

The MAFF approach appears to be a well-suited method for FOs that are in the process of forming. Moreover, due to major ecological and economic changes, farmers' needs will evolve and FOs require participatory tools, such as those offered through the MAFF approach, to identify problems and build solutions with their members. In the pilot projects the MAFF approach was appreciated for three reasons: (1) it teaches the use of management tools, (2) it creates opportunities for collective exchanges on problems and solutions, and (3) it uses a systemic approach to farm management. Once extension workers master the core principles, they are able to develop tools and training courses

adapted to local situations (taking both social issues and agricultural production problems into account).

In contrast, MAFF did not fulfill the needs of private firms since the problems they faced were much more straight forward technical issues. The dissemination of standard information and solutions fit better with their objectives. The need for more immediate economic returns on their investments is also an obstacle to the adoption of innovative methods that have human capital strengthening as their goal. Put somewhat differently, it is inappropriate for farmers and advisors to assess the MAFF approach only in terms of its impact on cotton production. The promotion of cost-benefit evaluation studies would be a way of indirectly maintaining the involvement of private firms in EAS that is oriented toward capacity-building.

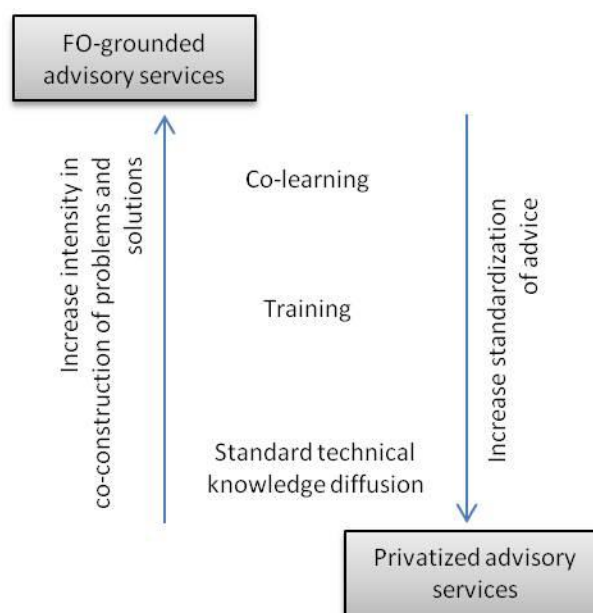


Figure 7: Core advisory services of farmer organizations and private firms

Source: Adapted from Labarthe & Laurent, 2011.

3.4 CPO capacities and key attributes needed in providing advisory services

Based on the lessons outlined above, we identify three dimensions of CPO capacities that are necessary for the sustainable delivery of EAS:

- the capacity to organize and implement services that can meet farmers' needs;
- the capacity to internalize issues, costs and management, and sustain them beyond project funding or pilot projects; and

- the capacity to make these EAS beneficial in terms of the capacity-building of the organization itself.

The experiences in MAFF implementation highlight key FO characteristics that should be targeted in order to strengthen their capacity to serve members' needs (see Figure 7). FOs are characterized by three main dimensions: their internal organization, their relationships with external actors, and their services and activities (Rigourd et al., 2008). FOs internal organization is related to their identity, scope, vision and strategies. Procedural and governance systems are included in this dimension. Relationships with the outside world determine a FO's legitimacy, power, autonomy and nature of partnerships. Other services (other than EAS) include all other activities, products and technical know-how that FOs provide or make available to their members, in the suitability and effectiveness of these services.

The capacity to organize and implement demand-driven EAS calls for true coordination among all related services and initiatives in order to better respond to farmer needs. It also requires appropriate balance between development of individual skills and collective endeavors. The ability to fully capitalize on potential EAS contributions requires the ability to monitor and assess EAS impacts. It is also necessary to take another look at the nature of partners. The capacity to sustain EAS beyond pilot projects calls for more complete absorption of EAS issues by elected representatives and the adoption of cost-reduction strategies. In the short term, the exchange of solutions and strategies among FOs through a regional FO network is one approach. Taking advantage of existing training courses to avoid duplication and an ad hoc approach to training is another.

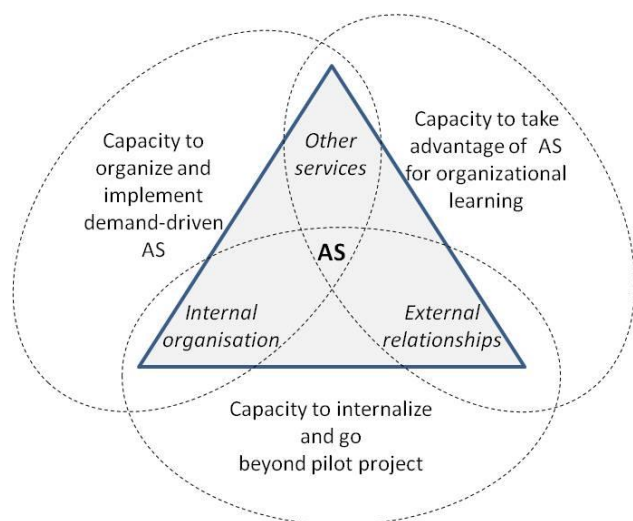


Figure 7: Key features and capacities of FOs in providing sustainable advisory services (AS)

4. Critical Issues That Need to be Addressed

The assessment of the capacity of farmer organizations FOs to provide extension and advisory services (EAS) cannot be separated from the advisory method selected and from the institutional and socioeconomic contexts in which they operate. To look beyond the context of the cotton sector and experiences in MAFF implementation three key issues are addressed in this section.

4.1 How can EAS help farmer organizations to insert themselves into value chains, and thus become more sustainable?

Extrapolating from CPO experiments with EAS provisioning is difficult because of their specific history with private cotton firms. This institutional dependency (as depicted in Figure 6.) has made it very difficult to effect any change in the EAS governance structures and implementation. It is interesting to note that the recently created cotton firms seem to be much more dynamic and willing to try out new activities with cotton producers. For instance, they have begun to orient EAS toward conservation agriculture trials and support.

However, the question arises as to the relevance of these FOs to various stakeholders. They remain embedded in production chains, but still have limited impact on increasing product values (at least, not enough impact to be recognized by private firms as valuable partners), yet are hampered in their ability to respond to boarder interests of members by financial limitations.

The provisioning of EAS by the FOs could serve not only as a means for increasing production and improving product quality, but also for enhancing the sustainability of production; for instance, through the promotion of more ecologically friendly practices. FOs will certainly gain more visibility and become more effective if advisory methods clearly address at least one of these recognized goals. Moreover, becoming qualified EAS providers appears to be necessary in order advantage of funding opportunities or to attract private firms as partners, investors or as buyers of agricultural products. But, in such cases, EAS will inevitably end up satisfying the interests of firms before those of farmers.

As long as private firms want to handle technical advice by themselves, FOs should invent new ways of providing EAS to members. Either they should assume the role of facilitators or mediators, to help farmers trust the interventions of the private firm, or they should find other ways to satisfy farmers' needs, according to their specific skills and capacities.

4.2 Are there other sustainable roles for advisory services provided by farmer organizations?

The experiments with the MAFF method have shown very interesting results, revealing the capacity of farmers to improve their livelihoods to a large extent thanks to improved management practices at the farm level (Lauby Samadoulougou, 2011). In this case, the role of EAS for family farms is to provide information that supports organizational and technical changes. This improved knowledge contributes to reducing uncertainty, thus improving each farmer's capacity to innovate (Labarthe, 2010).

The MAFF approach opens up a new path, inviting us to rethink the creation of added value by FOs. The current strength of FOs lies in their ability to mobilize the efforts of farmers and express farmers' concerns through service relationships, which are built on trust and joint action. The creation of added value could become the core of this service relationship, through the co-production of innovative solutions to farmers' problems. The FOs could act as innovation brokers, by linking external opportunities to farmer needs, exploring innovative production systems, strengthening farmers' learning and innovation capacities. In this way, the FO role could switch from a "compulsory partner for reaching farmers" to a "key partner for change and innovation".

This perspective requires innovative inputs on MAFF methods in order to better incorporate information and knowledge production and management issues at both the farm and the FO levels. We know that sharing problems, solutions and knowledge is a fundamental prerequisite for initiating joint innovation processes at the farm level. Sharing in this manner helps turn tacit understanding into explicit knowledge and thus leads to the strengthening of farmers' skills. FOs could play a crucial role in facilitating essential interactions for skills appropriation (Lundvall, 2005). These kinds of activities would be less expensive than recruiting numerous specialized advisors. For example, think-tank platforms called *clubs-conseils en agroenvironnement* have been established in the Canadian city of Quebec and appear to be very effective. They bring farmers together to discuss important issues such as rules for value chains, integration of new know-how at the farm level, the role for farmers in territorial development, etc. The FOs are also able to provide a collective framework that enhances the production of new knowledge and innovations (Fillipi & Triboulet, 2006).

To proceed further with such "learning and innovation services" requires new partnerships and financing mechanisms. FOs need to get closer to non-market stakeholders and existing learning systems, including public services, educational systems, research, as well as FO networks or firms with expertise in human resource management, skills reinforcement or learning methods. Financing mechanisms should be explored with FO members,

giving consideration to the beneficiaries' willingness and ability to pay. For instance, in the context of rural electrification projects in developing countries, funding schemes based on farmer payments have been found to be successful, since electricity supply is perceived as an essential service.

Learning-oriented EAS systems seem to be much more within the FOs' reach than market-oriented activities. In any case, the impact of market-oriented activities driven by FOs will be limited because of the lack of state regulation and support (Blein & Coronel, 2013). Learning-oriented EAS, on the other hand, require FOs to mobilize their main capital (i.e., human and social capital) and skills (i.e., creating trust and collective dynamics among local communities), giving them much more room for maneuver. Knowledge should become a new asset of the FOs.

4.3 What lessons are needed to help stakeholders highlight the distinctive features and roles of advisory services provided by farmer organizations?

In the context of the restructuring of the agricultural sector FOs face numerous challenges. First, the SNVACAs continue to be oriented toward the dissemination of technical information as a solution to rural development challenges, despite professing an increased focus on innovation processes and local knowledge. The decision to recruit hundreds of extension agents and make them work directly with farmers looks very much like the previous extension system – which has been shown to have many limitations.

While FOs perceive that the state's agenda favors technical advice – which is viewed as more favorable for agribusinessmen and private firms – others highlight the difficulty of implementing innovation systems effectively because this requires bringing together many different stakeholders (researchers, advisory-service providers, NGOs, farmer organizations and private-sector actors) and making them work together in a specific way (Nederlof et al., 2011). Moving beyond the usual triad of farmer, extension worker and researcher is difficult. Operational schemes are sorely lacking. How can we enhance interactions among stakeholders to change the way their organizations function and collaborate with others? What should be supported and paid for by the state?

When the functions and functioning of FOs are examined more closely, it becomes clear that FOs have much to do with innovation platforms. Because FOs address complex situations, they take into account farmers' needs and capacities, they act as intermediaries between actors who are not used to working together (e.g., banks, agro-industry, researchers, NGOs, farmers), and they create spaces for discussion, action, sharing and learning. Moreover, when implementing EAS, FOs tend to improve farming practices through joint experimentation and by linking farmers to

markets and other stakeholders. All these features have been identified as characteristics of an innovation platform (Hounkonnou et al., 2011).

We may wonder why FOs should be part of the national advisory system as EAS providers. The answer lies, as previously mentioned, in their main assets – human, social and local knowledge. They are uniquely positioned to play a greater role in structuring and pushing through innovation processes in rural areas. For this reason, EAS, which are “co-learning approaches” for capacity strengthening (Figure 7), should be explored in greater depth.

For instance, in cotton-growing areas, much more attention should be paid to research on alternative production systems that consume less expensive phyto-sanitary inputs and conserve soil fertility. Agro-ecology, integrated pest management and sustainable intensification could all be key issues around which FOs can be key partners, both because sustainability is improved with collective action and because agricultural innovation requires the fostering and sharing of local knowledge. EAS delivered by FOs could be a learning and innovation process for farmers, for the FOs themselves and for the FOs’ external partners.

However, viable economic models still remain to be found. Experience so far has shown that public funding for development programs is often not sustainable and we should not expect the case of EAS to be an exception. The establishment of regional or national development funds, or funding by sectors that already implement compulsory contributions at the marketing stage (such as the case of the cotton sector in Burkina Faso) offer more promising possibilities.

Moreover, the structuring of federated organizations, the evolution of the legal framework (OHADA Law) and the flourishing of private firms require that the FOs clarify their role and eventually change their functions and restructure their internal organization to conform to the laws. In this framework, the future of EAS seems to be a matter of negotiation between economic stakeholders. For instance, in the cotton sector, EAS have traditionally been handled only by companies. Nevertheless, official policies may be changed partially or even completely through lessons learned from MAFF pilots with CPOs. In the case of Burkina Faso, a lot will depend on the capacity of UNPCB to defend and project its achievements and core strengths.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, more lessons are needed on the different viable local models for the provision of EAS by farmer organizations. Models need to be capable of responding to the economic, environmental and social challenges, within the laws and policies that affect the structure and functions of FOs. Attention should be paid to the larger issue of the role of FOs in innovation processes, related to knowledge

production and bridging capacities that can lead to economic and social development. Local and small-scale pilot projects should preferably be implemented and monitored, with a strong focus on letting stakeholders operate in a self-directed manner, according to their respective capacities and goals.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

Where appropriate, an official English translation has been provided, with the original French name in brackets.

AFD	French Agency for Development [Agence Française de Développement]
AFDI	French Agriculturists and International Development [Agriculteurs Français et Développement International]
EAS	Extension and advisory services
CFDT	Compagnie Française pour le Développement des Fibres Textiles
CIRAD	French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development [Centre de coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement]
CPO	cotton producer organization
CRPA	Regional Centre for Agro-pastoral Promotion [Centre Régional de Promotion Agro-pastorale]
Fasocoton	Société cotonnière du Faso

FO	farmer organization
GPC	Cotton producers group [<i>groupe de producteurs de coton</i>]
GVs	Village groups [<i>groupements villageois</i>]
INERA	National Institute for the Environment and Agricultural Research of Burkina Faso [Institut National de l'Environnement et de Recherches Agricoles de Burkina Faso]
MAFF	management advice for family farms
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OHADA	Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa [Organisation pour l'Harmonisation en Afrique du Droit des Affaires]
PO	Producers organization
RG	Management Network (network of advisory-service POs) [Réseau Gestion]
SNV	Netherlands Development Organisation
SNVACA	National System for Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services [Système National de Vulgarisation et d'Appui Conseil Agricole]
Sofitex	Burkina Faso Textile Fiber Company [Société Burkinabè des Fibres Textiles]
Socoma	Société cotonnière du Gourma
UDPC	Departmental Union of Cotton Producers [Union Départementale des Producteurs de Coton]
UNPCB	National Union of Cotton Producers of Burkina [Union Nationale des Producteurs de Coton du Burkina]
UPPC	Provincial Union of Cotton Producers [Union Provinciale des Producteurs de Coton]

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